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Comrade Akbar: Islam, Marxism, and Modernity

Kamran Talattof

After the shah's regime was overthrown by the Iranian revolution of 1979, activists representing Islamic fundamentalism, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, formed an Islamic government, which over the past few decades has endured much internal and international turmoil. Many leading figures have appeared on the revolutionary stage and many have left. One of the survivors of these upheavals is the politician and Muslim cleric Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (b. 1934), who still plays a powerful role in Iranian politics. Once speaker of the Parliament (1980–89), acting commander-in-chief of the armed forces (1988), and president for two terms (1989–97), Rafsanjani currently chairs the Expediency Council and serves as the deputy chairman of the Assembly of Experts.¹ He also cofounded the Islamic Republican Party, which played a central role in Iranian politics until 1987, when it was dismantled. Rafsanjani's prerevolutionary anti-shah activities helped him earn a powerful position among the revolutionary elite who gained power in 1979. He also became famous for his ability to maneuver between opposing factions. His career, consisting of an amalgamation of opposition, maneuvers, compromises, and political flirtations, has enabled him to stay in the limelight since the revolution by being responsive but still vague enough to remain an object for interpretation. In the early 1980s, when political parties could still openly discuss the newly established regime, members of the Tudeh Party, a pro-Soviet and Marxist group, had a favorable view of him. This group directly or indirectly supported Rafsanjani and his approach over that of Mehdi Bazargan, the more liberal-minded first prime minister after the revolution. Indeed, the pro-Soviet Marxist groups revered Rafsanjani by calling him Comrade Akbar and Bazargan "liberal"—a political insult meaning the person advocated capitalism and was ready to "compromise with U.S. imperialism" once the opportunity arose.² They believed that Rafsanjani, in contrast, had anti-imperialist qualities and that he could lead the country on a path of "noncapitalist growth."

The Marxist groups that promoted these views are no longer present in Iran. The absence of these parties, however, does not prevent us from pondering a few questions. First, why

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1. The powerful Expediency Council arbitrates disputes between the Islamic Parliament and the Guardian Council (the latter makes the final decision on legislation). The main duty of the

Assembly of Experts is to appoint the Supreme Leader. Akbar Hashemi Bahremani Rafsanjani's official religious title is *Hojat al-Islam va-Muslimin*.

2. Bazargan, despite a long history of political activity, was not able to offer an alternative to the ideas of the Assembly of Experts, which was promoting the concept of *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the supreme jurist) as a political model and a solution to the crisis created by taking Americans hostage in Tehran. Ayatollah Khomeini stopped offering him support, and Bazargan resigned nine months after becoming prime minister.

was Rafsanjani, a significant player in the 1979 Islamic revolution and one of the longest-lasting public figures of the new regime, referred to as comrade (*refiq*), a term reserved in Persian for members of Marxist groups? Why did some Marxist factions portray a fundamentalist Muslim as an advocate of anti-imperialism and progressive social change? Why would certain forces in postrevolutionary politics, including the Soviet-backed Tudeh Party and the Organization of Iranian People's Fedai Guerillas (OIPFG), believe that Rafsanjani could lead the country toward independence and economic growth? We could ignore these questions and speculate that Rafsanjani received the title as a joke. However, the answers to these questions may explain not only Rafsanjani's political fortunes but also the roots and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East.

An Analytical Model for Understanding the Emergence of Islamic Fundamentalism

I contend that when the Islamic "paradigm" (an admittedly problematic concept I explore below) comes into contact with other ideological or political paradigms, it responds by producing an ideology similar to the one it has come into contact with—similar in terms of sociopolitical agendas, rituals, and figurative language. In modern times, these responses have included Islamic modernism (also referred to by some scholars as "Islamic liberalism" or "liberal Islam") as a response to Western influence and Islamic fundamentalism (otherwise known as "militant Islam," "Islamism," or "radical Islam") as a response to Soviet-Marxist influence. To prove this contention, I first make a distinction between Islamic modernism and Islamic fundamentalism. I then review the existing explanations of the ideological roots of the two tendencies, and, from there, I present my own possible explanation of the origins of these factions and expound on the analytical model I propose, that of "paradigmatic response." I use *paradigm* to mean an ideology in action (including thoughts, rituals, values, and metaphorical elocutions) or a body of beliefs that perpetually acts to influence the functions of society by providing or even imposing

a model for seeing and perceiving the world. I use *response* in place of a more mimetic term like *emulation* in order to stress the dynamic nature of the contact. Finally, I demonstrate the similarities between Marxism (then promoted by the Soviet forces) and what is known as Islamic fundamentalism today. I track these similarities in a variety of domains—from politics, economics, ideology, art, and literature to the political careers of players such as Rafsanjani. Most Middle Easterners did not perceive Marxism as a body of ideas and speculations about philosophy, history, economics, and politics developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-nineteenth century and modified by others later and were not familiar with its rich tradition in Europe. It was rather understood, through limited access and censored materials, as an exact science and as sacred as religion, an understanding closer to Stalinist dogma. The model of paradigmatic response, thus, might be able to explain not only why some Marxists could, perhaps lightheartedly, refer to Rafsanjani as "comrade" but also how shared political ideas undergirded both Iranian (and Middle Eastern) Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism. Finally, and in a broader sense, I hope that this approach can add to the existing theories of the formation and production of ideology, and how ideological texts engage their readers as subjects.

Islamic Ideological Trends:

Modernism and Fundamentalism

Recent violence committed by some fundamentalist groups as well as the Taliban regime's suppression of women reinforce the portrayal of Islam as a monolithic religion that resists modernization and practices gender segregation. However, the study of the history of contemporary debates in Islam and several political developments in Iran and many other Muslim societies prove that Islam is far from a unified religion with a single political ideological agenda. For each time philosophical or political compromise or temporary alliance between factions in one or another country blurs the border between liberal Islam and Islamic hardliners, there is elsewhere an ideological confrontation

that emphasizes the essential differences between these two interpretations of Islam.³ Two major tendencies explain this constant dialectic within Islam—between modernism and fundamentalism—and once the cause of the apparent contradiction is made clear, we will better understand the agenda of leaders such as Rafsanjani and the support he received from Marxist groups. But first we must explain the causes and the roots of these two trends—that is, explain why and how Islamic ideology as a medieval theological paradigm came to involve quite distinct versions of the religion in modern time.

Islamic modernism and Islamic fundamentalism disagree over several important issues: Islamic jurisprudence and its relationship with science; the relationship between Islam and politics and the proper form of government; the idea of civilization, civil society, and the nature of Western society; forms of proper behavior and lifestyle; and the status of women and the relationship between men and women in Islam.⁴ Regarding this last issue, for example, Islamic modernists conceptualize from the relevant Koranic verses a more liberal notion of gender and women's status in response to modern exigencies. In contrast, fundamentalists instruct women to cover their bodies head-to-toe except for face and hands, forbid social contact between the sexes, and consider the ideal roles for women to be those of chaste wife and good mother even if out of necessity they have to work outside the home. To them, veiled women symbolize Muslim virtue and the rejection of the West.

Islamic modernism has been around since the mid-nineteenth century in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, when liberal Muslim thinkers began to attempt to reconcile the Islamic worldview with Enlightenment ideas. They tried to promote the idea that Islam and

Western models are indeed compatible.⁵ They advocated a more tolerant and more democratic version of Islam, which was unparalleled among the Muslim elite until the 1950s.

Islamic modernism was especially dominant during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but since the 1990s it has reemerged in places such as Iran.⁶ Those who advanced a more liberal interpretation of Islam in regard to the new situation posed by contact with the West were prominent theologians and scholars of the early modern period who had critically scrutinized the orthodox Islamic concepts and methods in order to develop new notions of jurisprudence and theology. This theological trend included debates resembling those of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Prominent Muslim thinkers from Egypt and India-Pakistan were among the early advocates of this discourse. They lauded Western accomplishments, such as technology, the Newtonian conception of the universe, and Darwinian evolutionism, and Western styles of living. They came to believe that Islam was capable of adapting itself to modern times and its rationality and civic order.⁷

In Egypt, al-Afghani (1838–97; a Persian whose activities indeed stretched all over the Middle East) through his philosophical and political writings; Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) through his modern interpretation of the Koran; Mohammad Farid Wajdi (1875–1954) through sociological and political writings; Qasim Amin (1865–1908) through his presentation of women's issues; and Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966) through his works on the concepts of state and polity—all addressed many aspects of modernity (post-Enlightenment ideas about humankind, liberalism, progress, and the relation between religion and state) and their implications for their society.⁸ They strongly believed that progress

3. See the introduction in M. Moaddel and K. Talattof, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Islam: An Anthology of Modernist and Fundamentalist Thought* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 1–21.

4. Ibid., 3.

5. For more information on Islamic Modernism, see Charles Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh* (New York: Russell and

Russell, 1933), 259–68; Donald Reid, "Cromer and the Classics: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Greco-Roman Past in Modern Egypt," *Middle Eastern Studies* 32 (1996): 1–29; Nikki Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "al-Afghani"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); and Mansoor Moaddel, "Conditions for Ideological Production:

The Origins of Islamic Modernism in India, Egypt, and Iran," *Theory and Society* 30 (2001): 669–731.

6. Less than two decades after the revolution, Muslim reformists won in several elections, resulting in improvements in many aspects of society.

7. Moaddel and Talattof, *Contemporary Debates in Islam*, 1–21.

8. Ibid., 11–16.

was made possible through the development of these ideas. Indian Muslims presented similar issues and arguments in the mid-nineteenth century. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) presented a natural theology, Chiragh Ali (1844–95) wrote about modernity, Shibli Nu'mani (1851–1914) wrote progressive hagiographies, and Amir Ali (1849–1928) defended rationalist approaches toward history.⁹ In Iran, Islamic modernists supported the constitutional revolution (1905–11), the first major attempt to modernize the country.¹⁰ Shiite leaders such as Ayatollah Naini defended the legitimacy of constitution making in Iran on rational grounds and a few decades later the National Front promoted liberalism.¹¹

Islamic modernism has made a second strong emergence in Iran, and its confrontation with fundamentalism is no less passionate than that of its antecedents. The reformist movement in Iran impatiently seeks democracy, freedom, the assurance of human rights, and open relations with the West.¹²

Islamic fundamentalism—a political interpretation of Islamic discourse advocating an anti-imperialist sentiment, encouraging piety among members of society, and promoting the cause of the underprivileged—appeared in some Middle Eastern societies with the decline of liberal-nationalism leading up to the 1950s, and in the case of Iran more strongly in the late 1970s. It appeared in autocratic situations and in competition with other rebellious ideologies such as nationalism and, more so, Marxism. Islamic fundamentalists categorically rejected the Western capitalist model. Fundamentalists commonly oppose aspects of Western civilization,

and they tend to combat what they perceive as imperialist oppression. They even held the West responsible for the economic and technological backwardness of their own societies and criticized Western support of repressive regimes in the region. They adamantly defend Palestinians' right to a sovereign nation, an issue that once symbolized Arab nationalism but quickly became the rallying point of Islamic fundamentalism, and similarly they condemn the United States' unconditional support for Israeli actions and other Western interventions in the affairs of the Middle East. What makes fundamentalists' treatment of these topics distinct is that they use these issues to promote a universalistic ideology that is incompatible with the aspirations of the people for prosperity and progress in their societies, even if they manage to gain some level of support because of the strong emotions bound up with these concerns.

Advocates of fundamentalism in these countries vigorously reiterate orthodox Islamic notions about the monotheistic aspect of their theology: that God is unique. They emphasize the practice of the five pillars of Islam—to recite the profession of faith, to pray, to pay the *zakat* (the tax to support the poor), to fast, and to perform the hajj. Moreover, they adamantly push a Sharia-centered legal system to enforce a lifestyle that embraces the beliefs and practices of Islamic law as originally formulated in the early Islamic period between the seventh and eighth centuries.¹³ Their discourse became increasingly political as they addressed the dominance of Islamic modernism and Western influence.¹⁴ Just as the popularity of Darwinian evolutionary theory led to the reflexive rise of

9. *Ibid.*, 7–11.

10. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); and Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

11. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

12. The Iranian reformists, allowing modern interpretations of Islam, call for the reform of the country's political system. To the West, Mohammad Khatami represents this movement. However, many lesser-known Muslim intellectuals have been even more active in rendering unprecedented changes in many

aspects of Islamic philosophy and politics. Abdol Karim Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar have been particularly concerned with Islamic theology, whereas Said Hajarian, Akbar Ganji, Heshmat Tabarzadi, and Hashem Aghajari have been more concerned with Islamic governance and law. These reformers might disagree with each other or they might even be in fierce competition for gaining the leadership of the movement, but they all have had in common a desire for pluralism, democracy, and reform.

13. John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

14. This politicization even affected two major theological concepts of the religions: *jihad* and *ijtihad*. The Koran uses the word *jihad* as in the phrase “Jihad

fi Sabeel Allah” to imply “striving hard in God's cause”; this, to the Islamic fundamentalists, is a religious obligation. The meaning, however, varies according to the militancy of the groups and interpreters. To some extremists, Muslims have been victims of a great injustice that can end only when Sharia (Islamic law) is empowered. A Muslim can therefore help this cause by purifying the soul, rejecting injustice, and fighting threats with the pen or with arms. According to *ijtihad*, a Muslim must choose a learned cleric as a model and obey his advice. It is also believed that the Sharia is the life and the constitution of Islam, according to which authority lies with religious not civic political leaders. Islamic modernists, however, have been willing to consider alternatives.

Christian fundamentalism in the United States, the popularity of natural theology, rationalist interpretation of religious principles, and modernist exegeses of the Koran helped fuel the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁵ Since the 1950s Hasan al-Bana and Sayyid Qutb from Egypt; Abul Ala Maududi from Pakistan; Mustafa as-Siba'i from Syria; Abbasi Madani, Shaikh Nahnah, and Ali Belhaj from Algeria; and Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Motahari from Iran all have promoted absolute loyalty to a politically focused Islam and have rejected non-Islamic sources of learning. The Shiite scholar Ali Shariati and the political author Jalal Al Ahmad, both from Iran, also presented myriad political viewpoints that in one way or another have contributed to the rise of fundamentalist ideas about social and political issues. Shariati became popular in the 1970s by means of such writing. He indeed played a role in the rise of political Islam in Iran, and his ideas continued to inspire some factions of the Islamic forces who shared power after the revolution. Moreover, Shariati had devoted a significant part of his 1969 book *Islam shenasi (Islamology)* to analyzing Marx's life and ideas.¹⁶ In this work, known otherwise for being anti-Marxist with regard to Marx's atheism, Shariati explains the process through which Marx became a political leader and praises him for his sociological interpretation of oppression in history. At times Shariati appropriates Marx's ideas for Islam, and at other times he finds in Marx notions acceptable to Islam.

The rise of the political ideologies and movements that are more violent is also related to the dictatorial conditions. Such violence, in turn, often increases the suppression of freedom. Moreover, in the past, such movements often arose after Western-supported coups d'état. Finally, such violent fundamentalism has grown the least in Middle Eastern countries where there is some room for oppositional political activities. However, the analysis of the social and

economic conditions of a society alone does not explain the creation and roots of these ideologies, the divide in an ideological paradigm, or the production of ideology in general. Other factors and determinants such as cultural contacts, international conditions, and the influence of other ideologies must be taken into consideration.

Existing Theoretical and Explanatory Approaches

Scholars do not agree about the roots and rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Historical analysis, prevalent in academic scholarship on the topic, strives to locate the root of fundamentalism in some earlier period of Islam and explains the contemporary movement as an oppositional theology. For example, John Esposito writes, "From its earliest days, Islam possessed a tradition of revival and reform. Muslims had been quick to respond to what they regarded as the compromising of faith and practice: Kharijite secession, Shi'i revolts, the development of Islamic law, and Sufism. In succeeding centuries, a rich revivalist tradition expressed itself in a variety of concepts and beliefs, in the lives and teachings of individual reformers, and in the activities of a host of movements."¹⁷ Roger Du Pasquier also takes a historical approach in seeing fundamentalism as a reform movement rooted in the Islamic messianic tradition: "This 'spirit of reform,' often associated with the anticipation of the *mahdi*, has never wholly vanished from the Muslim consciousness. It has often taken on a 'fundamentalist' character based on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *Sunna*, seeking to restore an Islam purified of all innovations which fail to conform strictly to the letter of the revelation."¹⁸ This approach, however, overlooks the very current concerns of Islamic fundamentalists, such as issues of state governance, women, and the influence of the West. That is, Islamic fundamentalism does not withdraw from these issues the way, for example, orthodox or ultraconservative

15. Although most fundamentalists categorically reject the Western model and outlook, it has become increasingly normal for some groups to appropriate one or more aspects of science. For example, they do not hesitate to learn about computers and even use computers to promote their cause. Therefore, their approaches to Western scientific products are

selective and alter over time. Islamic Republic of Iran official Web sites, including those of the broadcasting agencies, ministries, and academia, have a segment called "Scientific" that often features scientific developments in certain fields in Iran and elsewhere.

16. Ali Shariati, *Islam shenasi* (Mashhad: n.p., 1969).

17. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 117. The Kharijites (Khawarij) seceded from the mainstream theology because they opposed what they believed to be impious state of affairs under both Uthman and Ali.

18. Roger Du Pasquier, *Unveiling Islam* (Cambridge: Redwood, 1992), 136–37.

Islamic sects do. Islamic fundamentalists on the contrary get involved, sometimes even violently. The selective representation of the past in order to justify the present is the stamp of Islamic fundamentalism or all ideologies for that matter.

Some scholars, however, have more successfully explored this dichotomy with regard to the question of modernity and the West, and they rightly take into consideration modern causes, such as Western influences on Islamic societies. Frederick Denny acknowledges the role of the West in the rise and spread of fundamentalism; however, he also pursues a historical approach, mapping the source of this movement back to Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi sect:

Contemporary Muslim fundamentalism has appeared on the world stage in the past few years partly because of the transportation and communication revolutions that have brought the peoples of the earth closer together, both in the various media and in actuality. But the global Islamic revival, which features fundamentalism as a major expression, began well before the current era. The revival can be traced to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reform movements in India, Indonesia, Egypt, Iran, and other places. Even before these movements, there was a radical reform in the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century launched by the puritanical preacher Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (c. 1703–1787) and enforced by his protector and collaborator, Ibn Sa'ud, ancestor of the present Sa'udi dynasty in Arabia.¹⁹

Similarly, Michael Gilsenan believes that the recent surge of Islamic fundamentalism is related to a quality of revivalism inherent in the Islamic tradition. He writes,

One of the single most important elements in what is often called Islamic fundamentalism is precisely this struggle over the definition of what is the tradition. . . . The notion and fact of diversity in the Islamic world is therefore no more a new one for Muslims than is the call for a return to the first principles, or rather, first practices, of the community. The so-called revival of Islam in the 1970s and after is not a revival at all but a continuation. Religious movements of all kinds—austere and ecstatic, legalistic and mys-

tic, activist and quietist—have been socially and politically highly significant since the late eighteenth century, as European and capitalist influence became predominant.²⁰

Ahmad Moussalli writes, "In fact Islamic fundamentalism has been part of an intellectual discourse which has been going on for hundreds of years in the East and the West."²¹ Explaining his contention, he contrasts Islamic fundamentalism with Islamic modernism in the area of reason and morality, philosophy and science, political principles, legislation, and views on revolution in order to demonstrate the differences between the two trends. However, most of the points of contention between the two as discussed by Moussalli are contemporary and do not belong to a period hundreds of years ago. Moussalli, for example, mentions the attitude toward the medieval political theories as one of the characteristics of these trends. True, but the trends must be contemporary in order to have an attitude toward something medieval. Moreover, Moussalli, and others too, believe that the difference between modernism and fundamentalism has been most obvious with regard to attitudes toward the West—again a contemporary problem.

Similar to Moussalli, there are others who seek the roots of Islamic fundamentalism in the philosophy of Abd al-Wahhab (1703–87; theologian and founder of the Wahhabi sect) or the thirteenth-century author Ibn Taymiya (1263–1328; a Hanbali influential theologian). There are also scholars who believe that Islamic fundamentalism stems from nineteenth-century reaction to colonial rule in the Middle East. All these follow the same historical approach in which they ignore the contemporary and current concerns of the Islamic fundamentalist movements in the Middle East.

Class analysis seeks to explain the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in terms of certain traditional middle-class interests. This includes the views of Middle Eastern leftist thinkers and the contentions of some prominent scholars of Middle Eastern studies who

19. Frederick M. Denny, *Islam: Religious Traditions of the World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 120.

20. Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1992), 15, 18.

21. Ahmad Moussalli, "Two Tendencies in Modern Islamic Political Thought: Modernism and Fundamentalism," *Hamdard Islamicus* 16 (1993): 51–78.

refer to this ideology as the “Islam of the Oppressed”²² or the ideology of some deprived traditional middle class.²³ Although there might be an element of class struggle involved, the Iranian revolution clearly proved that social groups embraced fundamentalism across class divisions.

With more attention to the political differences between the two representations of Islam, and taking into consideration economic factors, Sohrab Behdad uses a similar class analysis approach.²⁴ Working out from Bernard Lewis’s writing, Behdad concludes that the differences between modernism and fundamentalism are rooted in political and economic factors going back to early Islam and differences between the Prophet’s activities in Mecca and Medina. Muhammad’s activity in Mecca, Behdad writes, “was a challenge against the dominant clans and families of Mecca and the power and social order that they enjoyed,”²⁵ whereas in Medina Muhammad’s tradition “reflects the attempt of the Prophet to establish civil order.”²⁶ Based on this, Behdad argues that there are two distinct visions of Islamic ideology corresponding to two specific historical circumstances. The first is that of Islam the rebellious, the “idol smasher.”²⁷ The second is the vision of order in an Islamic state, “a class society.”²⁸ There is a lot of truth in such an analysis, but it limits itself to developments within Islamic societies, viewing Islam in isolation from other ideologies and foreign influence, and overlooks contemporary sociopolitical developments such as colonialism, globalism, and technology. How can one explain the fact that when the “idol smashers” come to power they not only continue to smash idols—for example, the Taliban’s destruction of the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan or Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali’s destruction of national monuments in Iran in the days following the victory of the 1979 revolution—but also fail to create states based on any long-lasting vision of society?

A number of other scholars believe that the current rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East is a reaction to the cultural and economic expansion of the West, especially the United States. They believe that Muslims do perceive fundamentalist movements not as nationalistic but as a universal ideology that seeks to establish the rule of Islam in all traditionally Muslim areas and eventually over the entire globe. These scholars believe that liberal and fundamentalist divisions are two different reactions by the Muslims to Western influence in their societies. Leonard Binder writes,

So long as the West was convinced that its moral superiority rested upon the confluence of rational discourse and its own political practice, the practical example of the liberal West encouraged the liberal interpretation of Islam. But when the West began to doubt its own moral superiority, then the norm of Western liberal rationality no longer served as a plausible explanation of political experience in the world. Consequently, it is no longer imperative that certain traditional Islamic practices be explained away, or even simply explained. . . . Consequently, the outstanding characteristic of the Islamic political revival of the 1980s was its rejection of Western liberal pretensions and practices and its sense of a heady freedom in reaching back into the history of Islam for authentic political and cultural inspiration that may have nothing whatsoever to do with the West.²⁹

However, Binder further states, “In a sense, the rise of Islam is an ideological dimension of the movement to restrict the power of the state—a movement constituted of a loose coalition of bourgeois factions, some rural agrarian capitalists, notables and estate owners, and the virtually proletarianized members of the state-employed petite bourgeoisie, the underemployed intelligentsia, and the large student population.”³⁰ This, he sees as a major function of the new Islamic ideology. G. G. Jansen similarly believes that Western political, military,

22. Juan R. I. Cole, and Nikki R. Keddie, ed. *Shi’ism and Social Protest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 30.

23. Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 2.

24. Sohrab Behdad, “Islam, Revivalism, and Public Policy” *International Review of Comparative Public Policy* 9 (1997): 1–41.

25. *Ibid.*, 3.

26. *Ibid.*, 4.

27. *Ibid.*, 2.

28. *Ibid.*, 3.

29. Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 4–5.

30. *Ibid.*

and cultural pressures caused Islam to respond harshly not only to the imperialists but also to its fifth column, that is, the advocates of Western ideas within Islam who help spread and consume Western culture: "Ayatollah Khomeini has identified this new enemy, for in his scathing denunciations of Western civilization, root-and-branch, he often makes mention of 'music,' a seemingly strange reference—he is obviously not referring to Bach or even to Stockhausen. The Ayatollah is referring to pop music which has literally become a universal phenomenon thanks to the Western-cum-Japanese technological product, the cheap transistor radio."³¹ These studies are correct only when we consider the nineteenth-century modernist response a branching off of the more orthodox, traditional, agrarian notion of Islam prevalent in the preceding centuries. Otherwise, they do not provide an adequate rationale as to why the West alone can instigate two distinct and often opposing (modernist and fundamentalist) responses in Islamic societies that lead to two distinct and diametrically opposed religious trends.

Finally, comparing Islamic activism in Iran and Egypt, Asef Bayat discusses a number of other sociological models that have tried to map out Islamic movements, but, as he explains, these models are primarily concerned with mobilization issues and revolution.³²

In addition to these, one can analyze Islamic fundamentalism in a broader universal sense as the Islam of the oppressed, a third world phenomenon that appeared in societies that, despite oil wealth, are essentially still underdeveloped. One may also examine Islamic fundamentalism as one example of a worldwide surge of fundamentalism that encompasses Judaism and Christianity. One cannot fail to no-

tice parallel behavior among fundamentalists in all three monotheistic religious traditions in such radical groups as the Egyptian al-Takfir wa al-Hijra, the Shi'a Hizballahi, the Christian Right in the United States, and the Jewish Gush Emunim. To these approaches, we may add the opinion of conspiracy theorists who believe that the United States created fundamentalist groups in the Middle East in order to combat communism and continues to control them.³³ Some ultranationalist theorists and leftist intellectuals advocate this view.³⁴ Finally, one should be aware of the assertions about the influence of the rise of European fascism on some of the political groups in the Middle East, such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s.³⁵

These historical and sociological approaches confirm that Islam since its beginning has produced different versions of itself. Indeed, as Fazlur Rahman explains, "Islam, ever since its inception, has faced and met spiritual and intellectual challenges and indeed, the Qur'anic Revelation itself is partly an emergent from the challenges flung to it by the older and developed Jewish and Christian religions."³⁶ However, as I have shown, these scholars and analysts differ in their explanation of the causes of the ideological and political divides in Islam. These approaches similarly disagree on the role the West has played in the emergence of the divide in the Islamic paradigm. This lack of consensus among scholars leaves room for argument about which of them should be favored or for other approaches to be pursued.

Paradigmatic Contact and Paradigmatic Response: An Analytical Model

What is certain is that in a variety of historical contexts in Islamic societies, the Islamic paradigm has faced various internal and

31. G. H. Jansen, *Militant Islam* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 123.

32. Asef Bayat, "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (1998): 136–69.

33. To create these groups is a different notion from the view that sees Cold War policies in Afghanistan as having armed and strengthened Osama Bin Laden and other so-called mujahideen.

34. Conspiracy theories have emerged in several forms, ranging from the absurd to the merely contemptuous, but they all have this in common: the United States created or helped to create fundamentalist groups and armed them to fight against Marxist, leftist, and secular groups that were directly or indirectly propagating Soviet influence; after the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States abandoned those fundamentalist groups, which in turn found a new enemy in the United States. Such analysis frequently appears even in the journals of leftist Iranians in exile. The Egyptian version is that fundamentalist Islam was a tool in the 1960s and 1970s

for deflecting communism and socialism in the Arab world, first promoted by Gamal Abdel Nasser and later a tool in fighting Soviet communism in Afghanistan.

35. See Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism, and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 210. The author makes references to the works of Charles Wendell on Egyptian nationalism.

36. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

external challenges and each has provided a response on behalf of Islam. This explains why Islam is diverse and appears to be able either to renounce or to adapt itself to other ideological paradigms. Moreover, Islam has hardly before been so profoundly challenged in terms of its worldview as it has since the end of the nineteenth century after coming into full contact with the West. Muslim intellectuals for the first time faced the profound question, "Why did we fall behind the West?"³⁷ However, instead of popularizing the question and finding all the possible answers to it, nationalists gave rise to sweeping movements that mostly gave importance to the need for a strong national language. By focusing on the national language and trying to purify and modernize it, these intellectuals reflected on and deeply criticized many traditional aspects of their culture, hoping that they could change society through it.³⁸ Islamic modernists on the other hand called for the reform of Islam. However, they mostly defended Islam as being able to accommodate Western scientific achievements or provide prosperity. These notions stood in contrast with the Western secularization thesis that required the separation of church and state. I consider the result of this contact between Islam and the West (which simply was a criticism of some aspects of Islam) as a response to and not an emulation of the premises of the Western secularization thesis.³⁹ This brings me to my alternative explanation as to why Islamic modernism and Islamic fundamentalism are two diverse trends of the same theological paradigm. Or, in other words, why Islamic *modernism* is a response to Western influence that first occurred in the late nineteenth century and continued into the early decades of the twentieth century and why Islamic *fundamentalism* is a response to Soviet Marxist influence in Muslim societies from the 1950s.

As mentioned above, a paradigm is an active ideology, a body of beliefs that perpetually attempts to make structured sense of how society works and how best to provide programs to make it work. A paradigm is a model, a set of suppositions about the world. It includes thoughts, rituals, and values that form a particular frame for perceiving any number of constructs whether "reality" or the "divine." About the divine, both Islamic modernists and fundamentalists still hold common suppositions, thoughts, rituals, and values, but about other principles and concepts they diverge. Modernist and fundamentalist Muslims provide two different accounts and two different responses to the issues facing Islamic society; they promote two different styles of life; they produce two different types of literary work; and they resemble two different foreign paradigms to which they respond—Western liberalism and Soviet Marxism, respectively.

Do the two Islamic trends represent two different ideologies? To answer this question, we need to define ideology. I believe that ideology is a set of structured metaphors that guide the conceptual and perceptual systems within which its advocates think, communicate, and act.⁴⁰ Ideology is, in other words, a systematic, inclusive, universal, ontological, metaphorical construction that aims to guide people in their pursuit of happiness and accomplishment. As a metaphorical construction, it creates new semantic systems, new models, new paradigms. Because they do not exist in a vacuum, ideological paradigms interact with other ideological paradigms and produce various responses. Indeed, in the long term these interactions create new ideologies.

Paradigm contact results in common practices, a common way of thinking, and a common response to the state and its social agendas through oppositional (and sometimes supportive) utterances. When paradigm contact occurs,

37. Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), 81.

38. See chap. 1, "Persianism: The Ideology of Literary Revolution in the Early Twentieth Century," in Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 19–66.

39. Ernst Gellner and particularly Robert Wuthnow show that secularism began during the religious revolution of the sixteenth century led by Martin Luther and John Calvin. See Gellner, *Nationalism*;

and Wuthnow, introduction to *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformations, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

40. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, 11.

responses are uttered in terms of metaphor, as well, which explains why there is such similarity between the rhetoric of fundamentalist Islam and Marxism, as I will show below.

Many analysts have shown the political, ideological, and economic similarities that exist between Islamic modernism and Western liberalism. Muslim modernists used similar language and logic as European thinkers to communicate, seeking to prove Islam capable of embracing and achieving modernity. They read Spencer's nineteenth-century promotional works on science and philosophy more or less in the same way they are read in the West. Individual liberal Muslims provided similar responses to questions arising from contact with the West. They attempted to interpret Islamic jurisprudence to accommodate Western science. They did not advocate a close affinity between Islam and political rule. They accepted the Western concept of civilization, claiming that they have contributed to it historically. They advocated relatively similar ideas about a greater role for women in society. They also promoted a style of dress and social manners harmonious with Western behavior. Islamic modernists accepted the importance of world civilization in the formation of world history. They submitted to many Western models and social theories, and they promoted the Western concept of democracy.⁴¹ Charles Kurzman summarizes this when he writes, "In historical terms Islam has consisted of countless varied interpretations, among these a tradition that voices concerns parallel to those of Western liberalism. . . . Among the concerns of this neglected tradition are opposition to theocracy, support for democracy, guarantees of the rights of women and non-Muslims in Islamic countries, defense of freedom of thought, and belief in the potential for human progress."⁴²

On the contrary, Islamic fundamentalists called for the end of the exploitation of human beings, the end of the rule of capital, and the end of the monopolization of land, as had the Marxists before them. How can one explain the existence of common terminology and concepts such as *taghout* (a term fundamentalists used during the Pahlavi era to refer to the ruling class), "bourgeois comprador," *mostasafin* (the oppressed classes), proletariat, *hokumat-e adl* (the rule of justice), and the "people's democratic republic"? They are the result of paradigmatic contact in the Iranian context between Islam and Soviet Marxism. When Alimohamad Izadi, the first minister of agriculture in the Islamic Republic of Iran, added an article (Band-e Jim) to the existing bill and laws for land reform, he received substantial support from some of the leftist organizations, but especially from pro-Soviet parties.⁴³ Moreover, Bernard Lewis writes, "The liberals, once in power, are obliged by their own philosophy to allow the fundamentalists to try to replace them, as often as they may choose. The fundamentalists, once in power, would admit no such obligation toward the liberals and would indeed see it as a dereliction of duty to allow free play to the enemies of God."⁴⁴ The first approach is indeed a liberal modernist response to the West, and the second is a fundamentalist, militant response to Soviet Marxist ideology. Both responses are at the same time similar to the ideology they are reacting to.

Soviet-type and fundamentalist Islamic governments have shared a similar technique in their international policy and in their eschatology. Both have used and benefited from proxies in other countries. The Soviet Union had the support of socialist parties all over the world and often used them to advance its policies and its propaganda. These parties have exerted

41. See articles by the liberal Muslims in the first section of Moaddel and Talattof, *Contemporary Debates in Islam*.

42. Charles Kurzman, ed., *Liberal Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–4.

43. According to Shaul Bakhash, "Band-e Jim" was a clause in article 1 of the land reform law of 1980 that applied to arable but fallow agricultural

land in the hands of private owners. Reza Esfahani, a Majlis deputy, became known for his advocacy of this article. See Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollah: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). See also Schirazi Asghar, *The Problem of Land Reform in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Berlin: Verlag Das Arabische Buch, 1987); Ashraf Ahmad, "State and Agrarian Relations before and after the Iranian Revolution, 1960–1990," in *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*,

ed. F. Kazemi and J. Waterbury (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991); and the Islamic Students Association in North America, *Band-e Jim* (Albany, CA: ISANA, 1981). It was, however, the Tudeh Party and the majority branch of the OIPFG who wrote on any wall they could find the slogan, "Band-e Jim RA Ejra Konid," meaning "Implement Article J."

44. Bernard Lewis, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

enormous influence over intellectual communities in the Middle East. In Iran, the pro-Soviet party Tudeh, even when extremely weak, never ceased from criticizing Western democracy in favor of what it perceived as socialism. Even those who disagreed with Tudeh and its Soviet ideology had come to believe that Western democracy did not exist in reality, that the bourgeois class in Western countries was just a bunch of bloodthirsty capitalists no longer able to “progress and produce culture,” and that the shah, who supported Western power, was simply an agent of the West. The OIPFG argued that the shah’s land reforms were all to serve the needs of Western capitalism.⁴⁵ Also, pro-Iran groups in Lebanon and other places overlook local politics in favor of the Islamic Republic’s foreign policies and continue to glorify the leaders of the Iranian revolution as supreme beings.

Leftist intellectuals all over the world supported socialism before Stalinism dominated Soviet policy, after which time the pro-Soviet parties were no longer “true revolutionary” forces. The demise of Soviet ideology started not too long after 1917 and under Joseph Stalin. Similarly, Islamic fundamentalism quickly became unpopular in Iran soon after 1979. These ideologies, once adopted by the state, revealed in a similar way their inability to ferment democracy. The 1991 coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev and the 11 September attacks were both desperate, apocalyptic attempts that revealed more than anything else the depth of the despair that an ideology can generate. In fact, although many believers in Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism concluded that the problem lay in the misinterpretation of their texts, others concluded that their ideology had simply failed.

Like Marxists, fundamentalists are overly concerned with theorization of ideology, the science and a strong response to the production of knowledge and science. This position is most obvious in the debates between Muslim

fundamentalists and modernists over Islamic jurisprudence. Both Marxists and fundamentalist Muslims connect their ideology to politics in order to find the proper form of government. Both embrace a binary notion that the world must be perceived as two camps: the dar al-Islam versus the dar al-Harb (and the abode of peace versus the abode of war), and the Socialist Bloc (the proletariat) versus the West (the bourgeois). Each has formulas for all aspects of life, including the role of women and gender relations, lifestyle, and proper behavior in various settings. Islamic fundamentalists and Marxists portray the West as an aggressive, exploitative, and materialistic force. Both promote state ideologies that do not advocate development through liberal capitalism.

Finally, many Islamic fundamentalist clerics such as Mawdudi, al-Banna, Seyyed Qutb, and Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as Islamic parties in Turkey, have subscribed to a quasi-socialist, egalitarian, or government-controlled economy (even though some, especially Ayatollah Khomeini, never directly rejected the institution of private property and free enterprise). It is not clear how they would achieve and implement such egalitarianism, but the ominous oratory against capitalism (very much like that uttered by Cuba especially during Fidel Castro’s visits to Iran) inevitably resonates with the poor and always comprises a huge part of their revolutionary discourse. During the revolution Ayatollah Khomeini promised not only to establish an independent, corruption-free state for the poor but also to provide them with housing and free water and electricity. Some Palestinian and Lebanese fundamentalist groups have indeed even fulfilled some of these promises to their respective constituencies to a limited extent.

The parallels between liberal Islam and Western liberalism and between fundamentalist Islam and Soviet Marxism are also evident in literature, literary activities, and theories of literary criticism.⁴⁶ An investigation of literary activities shows that modernist writers went so far as

45. Organization of Iranian People’s Fedai Guerillas, *Islahat-i arzi va natayij-i mustaqim-i an (Land Reform and Its Direct Impact)* (Tehran: OIPFG, 1974).

46. For a detailed discussion, see Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, chaps. 3 and 5.

to denounce some traditional concepts that had hitherto dominated literary history. In Iran, such tendencies emerged during the late nineteenth century and lasted into the twentieth century, when traditional forms of poetry came under attack by a new wave of writers who, mostly through their contact with the West, approached literature in a radically different way. Muhammad Ali Khorasani, Abd al-Rahim Khalkhali, M. Bahar, Ismail Yagani, Muhammad Afshar, Lahuti, G. A. Qajar, Sur Israfil, Hasan Rushdīyih, and others advocated reform in their literary activities. Even today a liberal cleric such as Ali Hairi reads Persian literature with an eye on Western theories.⁴⁷ Similar changes occurred in Arab countries and Turkey. Arab writers fascinated by Western democracy advocated an ideology based on independence and the glorification of the Arabic language to define an Arab identity. Mahmud Taymur (1894–1973), Shakib Arslan (d. 1946), Ahmad Faris al-Shadyaq, Amin al-Rayhani, Gibran Khalil Gibran, and Muhammed Kurd 'Ali (d. 1953) promoted an indigenous and national language and advocated the separation of Islam and governmental policies. In Turkey, Kemal Atatürk and the Tanzimat authors such as Ibrahim Sinasi (1826–71), Namik Kemal (1810–88), and Zia Pasa (1826–80) introduced new concepts and new forms into literature.

In the 1980s, an Islamic fundamentalist literary movement appeared throughout the Middle East. Its authors showed acute sensitivity to Marxist forms and concepts. In Iran, such literature provided the fundamentalist movement with ideological support. They described events of the 1979 revolution and its aftermath, including the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), as well as many new religious themes in a style similar to that of socialist realism.⁴⁸ This contemporary Islamic literature indeed resembled prerevolutionary literature in its expression of commitment (although with differing goals), its use of similar metaphors (although with different meanings),

its themes and motifs, and its content, form, and figurative language—all in the service of state ideology, which strived to subvert the ideological and historical significance of earlier literature.

As Marxist literary theory (inspired by the works of Mao Tse-tung and V. I. Lenin and the Communist Party's literary guidelines formulated by A. A. Zhdanov) and Iran's oppositional movement determined the dynamics of literature written before the revolution, the Council for Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic and other newly created cultural institutions regulated artistic and literary activities among Islamic writers after the revolution. Their new criteria resembled the Marxist idea of literary creativity.⁴⁹ Islamic literary theory, like that of Marxism, adheres to the notion of commitment. However, the difference between them lies in the ideology that inspires them. Marxist writers apply historical materialism, whereas Islamic authors apply creationism. Nevertheless, they both motivate their audience to reread history through their ideological fiction, to believe more wholeheartedly in their doctrine, and to advance their immediate political agenda. Islamic and Marxist literary movements also share common themes. For example, both defend the oppressed classes. They both promote uncompromising struggle against Western-oriented regimes. Both espouse a sort of revolutionary puritanism. The historical events of Karbala have nourished the concept of martyrdom (*Shahadat*) in Shiite political discourse, providing it with a particularly potent holiness and divine countenance. Marxist authors, such as Mahmud Dolatabadi in his ten-volume novel *Kalidar*, have used such rhetoric to arouse a sense of guilt and rebelliousness in apolitical people and to convince them to make sacrifices for an ideal society.⁵⁰ The literary language of contemporary Islamic literature abounds in the terminology of Marxist writers. Ayatollah Khomeini ordered in a decree to "break" the Marxist writers'

47. Ali Hairi, *Zehniyat va zaviyah-i did dar naqd va naqd-i adabiyat-i dastani: Naqdi bar, sad sal-i dastan nevisi* (Mentality and Perspectives: An Analysis of One Hundred Years of Persian Fiction) (Tehran: Kubah, 1990).

48. I refer to the work of fiction writers such as Muhammad Nurizad, Nusrat Allah Mahmudzadih, Mihdi Shujai, Muhsin Makhmalbaf, and Valid Amiri and poets such as Taymur Gurgin, Musavi Garmarudi, and Tahiri Saffarzadah.

49. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (English ed.) (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 10:48–49, cited in Mao Tse-tung, *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art* (Peking: Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 81–82.

50. Mahmud Dolatabadi, *Kalidar* (Tehran: Farhang Muasir, 1989).

pens, but Muslim writers usurped their rhetoric—"revolution," "spring of freedom," "imperialism" (cultural and other forms), "antagonistic," "conflict," "fight until victory," "rights of deprived nations," "international revolution," and "exportation of revolution"—to convey new meanings in favor of the new state ideology. Islamic authors derived their ideas of commitment, populism, anti-imperialistic sentiment, and justice from prerevolutionary literature. The Islamic ideology of representation called for commitment to the community. Islamic writers, too, called for the commitment of the population (if only the religious) in supporting the Islamic nation against enemies such as Iraq, the West, and the Left. This literature never gained the respect of major literary critics, but it became a strong political tool in the 1980s, taking the place of leftist literature weakened by the Left's failure to gain power in the revolution.

Arabic and Turkish fundamentalist literatures also categorically reject liberalism and Western literary influence while preferring the committed and socialist realist styles. In Arab countries, the committed literature, which had lost much of its dominant position after the defeat of Arab forces by Israel in 1967 and the decline of socialism, remained influential on the language and literary style of Muslim fundamentalists such as the authors from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan and the supporters of Hamas in Palestine. In Turkey, growing Islamic literary activities emerged in response to the secular ruling elite and inspired by Marxist literary concepts. İsmet Özel, Sezai Karakoc, Süleyman Cobanoğlu, Cahit Zarifoğlu, and the authors affiliated with the Refah party represent this Islamist literary movement. Using such concepts, a group called the "Muslim Poets," including among its members Turan Koc, Mevlut Ceylan, Sezai Karakoc, Cahit Zarifoğlu, and Afif Ayyar, derived their imagery from Islam.⁵¹ Özel, a former Marxist turned Islamist, brought many notions from his past ideology with him. Much like the Iranian

Ali Ahmad, who abandoned Marxism in favor of Islam in search of a new identity, Özel too wrote on consumerism and alienation, arguing for a return to Islamic values.

In their literary expressions, fundamentalists and Marxists display a particular vengeance in using effective slogans, metaphors, and symbols for appealing to the oppressed and working classes or for the purpose of indoctrinating people. The media used for these propagandistic purposes include not only literary works but also films, plays, mass media, stamps, children's books, and textbooks. The covers and pages of such books are often designed with specific photos with exciting ideological captions.⁵² Through these, they both engage in their revolutionary struggle, harboring aspirations to replace governments with their own political system. Neither ideology is concerned with nationalism. It is not accidental that both Islamic and Marxist fundamentalists have used slogans commencing with "Down with . . ." and "Death to . . ." since both employ metaphorical language to excite their supporters. It is not accidental that posters from socialist revolutions portrayed well-groomed men, huge and strong, or that the fundamentalists used large pictures of their own handsome men (at least in the paintings) to decorate the streets. The pictures, posters, and murals in the streets of Moscow in the 1920s and Tehran in the 1980s bear an astonishing resemblance to one another, a resemblance greater than what might be found between different Islamic factions. For example, one may find common forms of expression, metaphor, and even ritual between al-Qaeda and the early Wahhabi advocates or between al-Takfir wa al-Hijra and early Kharijite members,⁵³ but no matter how similar, they convey different meanings. Takfir and Hijra do not have the same implications now as they did centuries ago. Their implications are similar to the Middle Eastern type of Marxism.

For more than two decades, Rafsanjani used his knowledge of Marxist rhetoric to glorify the poor, the barefoot, the oppressed, the

51. See "Conclusion: Applicability of Episodic Literary Movement in Arabic and Turkish Literature," in Talat Toft, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, 173–75.

52. On the ideological use of children's books by Marxists and Muslims, see Paul C. Mishler, "Communism for Kids," in *Defining Print Culture for Youth*, ed. Anne Lundin and Wayne A. Wiegand (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2003); and Peter Chelkowski and Hamid

Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

53. See note 17 above on the Kharijites.

antimodern, and the anti-Western. He invested an enormous amount of energy in his propaganda war against any aspect of Iranian custom, art, and literature that might give room for worldly redemption. On the basis of numerous reports, these strictures, however, have not prevented him from accumulating wealth for himself and his family or from using his power to enrich himself.⁵⁴ To solve the apparent contradiction between his words and actions, he has used the same authoritative language that the personalities in Islamic fundamentalism and, before them, the personalities in the Soviet Union used. It is not surprising that Hashemi Rafsanjani's language in recent years has become the target of the reform movement. Akbar Ganji, a leading reformist, spends much of his book on democratic political process in Iran criticizing these very words of Rafsanjani. Ganji writes, "Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani's language is not only insulting but it always contains threats against critics and the opposition."⁵⁵

As depicted in his autobiography, Rafsanjani had developed a strong, mature personality before he moved to Qom at the age of fourteen to study Islam. When back home, he was helpful to his family in the affairs of their farms, orchards, and livestock.⁵⁶ When he became a religious scholar, he showed exceptional qualities. He had photographs taken of his wife and children, which was an unconventional and rare act for any mullah to perform in those days. Although rooted in religious circles, he provided his children with a secular education and raised them to be ambitious in their careers. They all eventually rose to the top echelon in either business or the public sector. He provided his close family and friends with opportunities to secure lucrative careers and prosperous living conditions. Notwithstanding his generosity to kith and kin, his dealings with opponents were decisively chilling. The fate of Saidi Sirjani, a literary scholar and social critic who was imprisoned and died in jail for criticizing Rafsanjani,

and those prisoners who vanished during the period from 1981 to 1988 is evidence of the undeterred conviction to castigate and silence the opponents during his presidency. Human rights groups have blamed him for the secret killing of several writers, reporters, and reformist intellectuals, known as "the chain murders," which was planned during Rafsanjani's presidency.

All this indicates that there is no Islamic archetype with which Rafsanjani can be compared. There has never been an ideological, political, religious state in modern history within which Rafsanjani could have thrived. On the other hand, the Soviet Union witnessed an efficient, intelligent, and yet notoriously cruel despot in Stalin, a comrade to all Middle Eastern pro-Soviet parties. In a recent biography of Stalin, the author portrays him as a charismatic man who exploited his personal power to realize his objectives.⁵⁷ He became a tyrannical leader who acted more like a mafia boss than the head of a legitimate government. He could be charming and amiable to a friend one day and then slaughter numerous innocent people the next day with stolid conviction.

With complex personalities, political skill, and violent methods, both Stalin and Rafsanjani ruled their nations unchallenged for a long time, defended their countries against foreign invaders (whether Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler), and improved the economy of their nations even as they appeared enigmatic to the Western world. During their rule, they were both astute and intuitive. Their stories provide a successful testimony to the efficacy (at least temporarily) of the powerful amalgam of vice and ideology in running the affairs of a state. Before the end of their rules, both comrades had created a police state where any rational system had been replaced by a cult of the personality and ego, where the leaders resembled none other than God.

Of course, to the members of the Tudeh Party, Stalin remained a true Marxist, the one

54. About the wealth of Rafsanjani's family, *Forbes* reported, "Today, operating through various foundations and front companies, the family is believed to control one of Iran's biggest oil engineering companies, a plant assembling Daewoo automobiles, and Iran's best private airline (though the Akbars insist

they do not own these assets)." (Paul Klebnikov, "Millionaire Mullahs," *Forbes*, 21 July 2003). Moreover, the BBC has reported that Rafsanjani is the forty-eighth richest man in the world.

55. Akbar Ganji, *Alijane sorkhpush va alijane khakestari* (*The Red Eminence and the Gray Eminences*) (Tehran: Tarhe No, 2000), 153.

56. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Doran-e mobarezeh* (*The Time of Resistance*) (Tehran: Nashr-e MI, 1997).

57. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

who continued and improved the line of Marxism-Leninism. It then does not sound too strange to hear Tudeh Party members complimenting Hashemi Rafsanjani by calling him "comrade." Rafsanjani had flirted with Marxist ideas like many other Muslims. As mentioned earlier, when in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution he became a critic of Mehdi Bazargan's provisional government; he greatly pleased the Tudeh and other pro-Soviet parties. Indeed, the level of intimacy between Soviet Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism is best demonstrated in the coordinated efforts of the two groups against the liberal government of Bazargan. They caused it to collapse after only nine months. It was during this short time, in 1979, under the provisional government that Islamic fundamentalists managed to gain absolute hegemony over and redirect the revolutionary movement, which had thus far overthrown only the shah's government, an act many saw as the first necessary step toward democracy.

Before the 1979 revolution, Rafsanjani was among those who condemned the Organization of People's Mujahideen of Iran (OPMI) for their ideological shift. The OPMI began its struggle against the Pahlavis' rule in the late 1960s and joined the OIPFG in the armed struggle while being inspired by many aspects of Marxism. The OPMI formed a team to write up a systematic Islamic ideology for their organization. What they did was translate Mao's simple works on Marxist philosophy and Marx's *Wage Labor and Capital*, coming up with an ideology that was both Marxist and Islamic.⁵⁸ The OPMI even mobilized prominent theologians such as Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani. In his book *Islam va malikiyat (Islam and Ownership)*, Taleqani is not shy to embrace socialist ideas. He argues that religion and socialism share the notion of a classless society; God did not want humankind to be unequal.⁵⁹ It was not only the OPMI that had to deal with the temptation to adopt material. In the 1960s and

1970s, as Islamic fundamentalism responded to the spread of Marxist ideas, it gained some of the characteristics of Marxism and Maoism with a dash of Herbert Marcuse and a dose of Frantz Fanon. Indeed, the phrase *Islamic socialism* became popular in many Middle Eastern societies. But there was a split in the OPMI, and the majority of members at the time announced Marxism as the sole ideology of the organization. The Muslim members re-created the OPMI, which became one of the largest oppositional groups after the revolution and is still active today in exile in Iraq and elsewhere. Rafsanjani still takes pride in his condemnation of the group at that time, indicating his awareness of such an ideological mixing.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Ideology is not produced in a vacuum; every agent is influenced by the political, economic, and historical context in which he or she lives. Understanding this context is essential for understanding the problematics of ideology. However, a society does not exist in a vacuum either. Understanding the ways in which cultures, ideologies, and ideological paradigms contact each other through universalistic movements and beyond national boundaries is also essential for understanding the production of ideology, the rise and fall of ideological movements, and divides in ideological paradigms.

From the early years, Islam has included many variants such as Shiism and Sunnism. However, in recent times, two modern Western paradigms, Western liberalism and Marxism via the Soviet Union, have provoked two distinct Islamic responses. The Islamic paradigm's contact with Marxism occurred over a period of time and in different ways. In Iran, it occurred during the time of Reza Shah, when Marxism appeared systematically in the Iranian polity and was noticed by Muslims. It also occurred in the 1950s during Mosaddeq's time when both ideologies were in competition with the

58. The latter book is titled *Eqtesad beh zaban-e sadeh (Economy in Simple Language)*. Some Marxist sympathizers in Iran read the book to learn more about the Marxist theory of economy. For more information on these free translations, see Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 92–93.

59. Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani, *Islam va malikiyat* (Tehran: Masjid-i Hidayat, 1951).

60. Speaking of the members of the OPMI abandoning Islam to become Marxists, it should be added that many Iranian and Middle Eastern Marxists indeed hailed from religious families, where in their youth they had received religious education. This factor adds to the resulting similarities between the cultures of the two ideologies, at least as far as the Middle East is concerned.

National Front's liberal nationalism. It occurred in 1953 in Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood, after being dissolved by the government, allied with the communists. It occurred in the late 1960s in Iran when the Marxists and Muslims simultaneously concluded that an armed struggle would best accelerate the downfall of the Pahlavis. Finally, and most important, it occurred in the 1960s and 1970s when theologians and Islamic thinkers, many of them contemporaries of Rafsanjani, took it on themselves to enter a philosophical debate with Marxism. The works of Shariati and Al Ahmad are not the only examples of this. Scholars such as Reza Davari and clerics such as Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai and Morteza Motahari also wrote extensively in response to Marxism's ideological expansion. They all had to study Marxism (to the extent that it was available to them), and they consequently used the same language (and not the language of the medieval Kharijites, Tabari, or the Wahhabis). They sprinkled their debates with Koranic verses and addressed the issues of their time—especially the opposition to Westernization—the very topic that was also combated by the Marxists.⁶¹ However, Islamic fundamentalism, contrary to Islamic modernism, was not a reaction to the spread of Western ideas about modernity and democracy. By that time, the Middle Eastern dictators had effectively blocked off access to these ideas. To be sure, Muslim fundamentalists did not criticize the dictators for preventing the growth of Western democracy; they did not study democracy. It is therefore safe to say that what separates Soviet Marxism and Islamic fundamentalism (both of which are highly monistic, deterministic, and hierarchical) on the one hand and Western liberalism and Islamic modernism (both pluralistic and relativistic) on the other is, above all, their attitudes toward Western democracy.

Both Marxism and Western liberal democracy have strived to provide answers to some of the most basic questions of modernity. Marxism sees the salvation of humankind through the empowerment of the collectivity, and Western liberalism emphasizes a protected universal freedom of the individual. This quest also played a role in the creation of a diverse Islamic response, but because it had not experienced reformation, Islam has not been able to resolve its position vis-à-vis this central concept of modernity. That is, the majority of the societies where Islam is dominant still struggle with modernity and democracy. Strong and especially violent reactions are more likely in such societies where traditional roots are being cut; where traditional questions are no longer important in the face of modern challenges such as women's rights, science, and globalization; and where a lack of economic growth and the existence of authoritarian regimes inhibit intellectuals who strive to deal with the question of modernity. §

61. For the views of these contemporary Muslim philosophers, see Reza Davari, *Vaze kununi-ye tafakkur dar Iran (The Present State of Thought in Iran)* (Tehran: Surush, 1978); Morteza Motahari, "Osul falsafeh va ravesh-e realism" ("The Principles and Methodology of Realism"), in *Majmueh asar (Collected Works)* (Tehran: Sadra, 1992); Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Shiite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).